

Jerusalem - Open City for Learning World Peace

International Conference at the Lassalle-Institut, Zug/Switzerland
April 14 - 17, 2008

Adress of welcome

by Matthias Michel, Member of the Government of the Canton of Zug

Dear religious and political leaders
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of the Canton of Zug, I would like to welcome you in one of the smallest states worldwide: The canton of Zug is one of the 26 constitutional entities with its own autonomy within Switzerland. And with its only 240 km² and slightly more than 100'000 inhabitants, Zug is the smallest canton in one of the smallest states in the world.

Why, therefore, shall we meet in such a tiny place, when it comes to discuss one of the world's most complex problems, which is the future status for the holy city of Jerusalem?

First of all, it is your strong will to come together and to find solutions, and most of you have come from far to meet here, in a quiet, neutral place in a house of spiritual power. Even this will and this action of coming together, which I appreciate, makes this place special and important.

Furthermore, you have chosen to meet in Switzerland, a country of long peace and stability. Our problems can not be compared with the ones in Israel and Jerusalem. But, a few centuries ago, Switzerland was split up because of political as well as religious reasons. And we knew a lot of wars even within the Christian communities.

Switzerland was not created as a nation, unified by religion or language or cultural identity. But it was and still is a so-called nation by will: The strong will to create a political community with rules of law accepted by all, was and is the basis of our nation. On this basis, Switzerland has known a long period of peace, stability and welfare.

I'm far away to think, that Switzerland's model can easily be taken over by other communities. But nevertheless, it is worth to analyze our system and political tradition:

Democracy is the important basis of our nation. We have to respect the will of the majority. But the opinion of the majority is limited: Human rights - like the freedom of worship and of conscience for all - are protected and can not be violated by the majority. On the contrary: The rights and freedom of minorities are important elements of our system.

Another element of our state is the unique government system. There is no ruling party, but there are several: Each important political party is represented in the government, so-called a government of concordance. In other words: After the election, there is no change in the Government of one ruling party to another one, as every party with a certain importance in the Parliament will still have its members in the Government.

I would like to mention a last important element, which is the federalism: Our communities and cantons have their partly autonomous status. This guarantees a high identification of the inhabitants with their communities and local governments. And problems are solved where they arise, not elsewhere, far away in a centralised administration.

Togheter with other checks and balcances, the democracy with the protection of minorities, the system of a concordance government and the federalism are important pilars of our state, our stability and peace. Our system and experience can eventually serve as examples to be picked up.

That stability and peace could one day be realized in Jerusalem, that's the strong wish of us all. All efforts made to reach this goal, are important. This conference may be one of these efforts. Therefore, I wish you a good conference.